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Students First

A Guide for Students

Preparing to Write
the Social Studies 33
Diploma Examination



Preparing to Write the Social Studies 33 Diploma Exam

Dear Student:

The authors of this guide are staff from the Student Evaluation Branch. These are the people who actually put together the exam you will be writing. They also organize the marking sessions and train the teachers who mark the exams. These people see first-hand what thousands of students are doing right (and wrong) when they write an exam.

This guide and all other diploma exam-related materials produced by Student Evaluation Branch staff are identified with the logos



I hope you will find this guide helpful. Good luck on exam day!

*Frank Horvath, Director
Student Evaluation Branch*

Getting ready

✓ Set a goal

The best way to prepare to write the Social Studies 33 Diploma Exam is to decide, even before the course begins, that you will be successful. Set a reasonable goal for yourself and try to achieve it.

You can't prepare for a diploma exam by last-minute "cramming." The knowledge you gain and the skills you develop as you participate in the course are essential parts of the process of preparing to write the exam.

The mark your teacher assigns you is worth 50% of your final blended mark in Social Studies 33. So, the better you do in class, the better your opportunity is for success in getting the final course mark you want. As well, the skills and knowledge you gain in class are essential to your success on the diploma exam.

✓Make a commitment

To be successful in Social Studies 33, you must be prepared to make a commitment. There are lots of things you can do, but below is a list of some *proven* ways to be successful:

- attend class regularly
- participate in classroom activities
- complete all assignments
- learn the course materials
- improve your reading and writing skills
- ask for help if you are having difficulty

By trying your best during the course, you will build your confidence. Then, when you sit down to write your diploma exam, you will feel well prepared and ready to do your best.

General advice

✓Take advantage of the exam's design

The Social Studies 33 diploma exam contains

- 60 multiple-choice questions worth one mark each
- four writing assignments worth ten marks each

The writing assignments are placed at intervals throughout the exam. Each writing assignment is on the same topic as the set of multiple-choice questions that comes before it. For example, a writing assignment about economics follows a set of multiple-choice questions about economics.

There are two reasons why the exam is set up this way.

- We want you to be able to show your best work. Because we have placed the writing assignments throughout the exam, you are not required to do four writing assignments in a row at the end of the exam, which could be a tiring experience.
- Because the writing assignments are next to multiple-choice questions on the same topic, you can use ideas and information from the questions to help you write your response.
Remember, an exam does not just ask you *for* information, it can also provide you *with* information.

✓Use your time wisely

We designed the diploma exam so that you can comfortably complete it in 2 1/2 hours, but you can take up to 3 hours. Just because it is legal to leave after one hour does not mean that you must. If you hurry, there is a greater chance that you will misread instructions, or will leave work undone or incomplete.

If you usually take a long time to write an exam, be sure to budget your time so that you complete everything required.

Use your time wisely to

- **read the material thoroughly**
- **think about what you are being asked before you respond**
- **plan your written responses**
- **select information that is in the exam that you might be able to use in completing your written responses**
- **reread your finished writing**
- **correct and revise your finished writing directly on your final work**

Advice for completing the multiple-choice questions

✓ Know the types of questions you will face

The exam includes several different types of multiple-choice questions, and each type requires you to demonstrate a different use of your knowledge and skills.

1. *By 1937, Nazi Germany was a member of the Axis military alliance with*

- *A. Italy and Japan
- B. the Soviet Union and China
- C. Spain and the United States
- D. Great Britain and the Netherlands

Question 1 is an example of a question that asks you to select the answer that is the only possible choice (the correct answer is “A”). All other choices are wrong.

2. *From the viewpoint of a capitalist, the best way for a government to encourage national economic growth is to*

- A. raise the income tax rate for wage earners
- B. take control of profitable large corporations
- C. increase spending on social security payments
- *D. reduce the number of rules placed on businesses

Question 2 is an example of a question type that asks you to use your judgement to select the “best” answer. All four choices identify answers that could be correct, depending upon the question asked, but only one choice is appropriate, given the focus of the question. In this case, the correct answer is “D.” You must use your knowledge and your thinking skills to judge the answers and select the best one.

Use the following opinion to answer question 3.

A great threat to democracy comes from the possibility that the wealthy can gain too great an influence over the policy decisions made by elected officials. We need to ensure that our democracy serves the wishes of all people, not just a select few.

3. *The author of this opinion would most likely favour legislation placing strict rules over the*

- A. *number of political parties allowed to compete in elections*
- *B. *amount of money individuals can contribute to an election campaign*
- C. *freedom of the media to investigate and report on the actions of politicians*
- D. *qualifications citizens need to meet in order to vote in elections*

Question 3 is an example of a question type that asks you to examine an information source (such as a cartoon, graph, quotation, diagram, or table) and apply the information it provides to answer the question. You need to read and interpret the information source very carefully *before* you can identify the correct answer. (The correct answer is “B.”)

✓ **Approach each question actively**

It is important to read each multiple-choice question and the source information carefully. You may wish to use a highlighter pen or a pencil to circle key words and ideas. Or, you may want to cross out the choices you know are wrong, or write down a brief summary of what you have read. The exam is yours to use, so write on it and mark it up as much as you want.

Identify the correct answer in your own mind. If, when you look at the four choices, you don’t immediately see the answer you thought of, try to eliminate the ones that seem most incorrect or unlikely. Then, use your judgement to choose an answer from the choices that are left.

By taking this active approach to each question, you may improve your chances of selecting the correct answer.

Advice for completing the writing assignments

- ✓Read the assignment carefully and do what is asked of you**

It is well worth your time to carefully read all the instructions and information provided. By using a highlighter pen to emphasize key words, you can focus clearly on the task you must complete.
- ✓Plan your writing**

Space for planning is provided to help you to organize your work. Use it! Successful writers usually take the time to plan what they will say by using a variety of planning techniques, such as listing ideas or drawing a web diagram. Use the method with which you are most comfortable.
- ✓Stay focused**

As you write, keep checking to ensure that you remain focused on the assigned task. Don't let one idea lead you to another that is not related to your topic.
- ✓Support your ideas**

The writing assignments require you to present and support ideas. The most convincing and informative pieces of writing include support (illustrations, examples, facts) for the ideas that are being presented.
- ✓Think about your reader**

Your writing will be marked by Social Studies 33 teachers. Your job is to express your ideas clearly. You must help your reader to understand your ideas by giving specific examples that are accurate and related to your topic. Show your reader why you are thinking as you are.
- ✓Be careful when using the information contained in the exam**

You are encouraged to use information provided within the exam to help you complete your writing assignments—but be careful. Multiple-choice questions contain *wrong* as well as *right* answers. If you choose to use information provided in a wrong answer, you will weaken your writing. If you are unsure about the correctness of some information, it is best to choose another example. Information contained in a source such as a quotation, cartoon, or graph may be a better choice.

If you do choose to use information provided in the exam remember that it is provided to help *stimulate* your response, *not to be your response*. A written response containing *only* information from the exam, strung together into a few sentences, is not as good as a written response that carefully chooses information from the exam to add support to well-thought-out ideas and explanations.

✓Reread your work

You get marks for the clarity and correctness of your writing, as well as for what you say. So, be sure to take some time to reread your writing carefully.

Don't read what you *thought* you meant to say. Read what you actually said. As you reread, ask yourself questions such as these:

- Are my ideas consistent, or do they contradict each other?
- Did I support my ideas with thorough explanations?
- Did I use examples that are historically correct and relevant to the topic?
- Is my writing organized and easy to follow?
- Did I use correct spelling, punctuation and grammar?
- Did I use words correctly?
- Will my reader understand *why* I have said what I said?

✓Make corrections to your finished work

If you think of changes that will improve your writing, make them. Don't worry about crossing out a sentence or adding another word. The markers understand the conditions that you are writing under, and they expect to see corrections and revisions on your finished work (as long as they can still make out what you have written).

✓Use a pen for your finished work

Use a blue or black pen, not a pencil. Then, the markers will be able to concentrate on what you said in your written response, instead of thinking about how difficult it is to read.

✓Writing assignments

Each writing assignment is worth 10 marks. You should put an equal effort into completing each one. When you get to the last one, it may be tempting to rush through it and make your escape! Resist, and give it just as much attention as all the others.

✓Try to relax

Having some anxiety when writing examinations is natural, but do not get too "stressed-out." (Instead of last-minute cramming, get a good night's sleep.) Try to stay calm and relaxed as you complete the exam. Concentrate on giving the exam your best effort.

It might help to remember that the exam markers are Social Studies 33 teachers who understand what exam conditions are like and want to see you do well.



Additional Reminders

✓Further information

For more detailed information about the Social Studies 33 Diploma Examination, ask your teacher about a booklet from Alberta Education called the *Social Studies 33 Information Bulletin*. Each Social Studies 33 teacher will have a copy.

This bulletin contains a great deal of information about the diploma examination as well as the scoring criteria used by markers to evaluate your written work.

✓Writing your exam on a word processor

If you normally do your written work on a word processor, you may have an opportunity to use a word processor for writing your diploma exam. Speak to your Social Studies 33 teacher about this. Every school now has copies of the Interim Policy: *Writing Diploma Examinations with Word Processors*.

✓Exam-writing materials

You are responsible for providing your own writing materials—pens, HB pencils, highlighters, etc.

✓Rescores

You may request a rescore of your examination if you believe that the mark you have received is not appropriate. Before applying for a rescore, be sure to check your *Diploma Examination Results Statement* to find out the distribution of your marks. The multiple-choice mark is not likely to change, but your mark on the written responses could change slightly. Remember that the mark, whether it increases or decreases, will be your final mark. There is a \$26.75 fee for this service.

✓Other questions

If you have questions about the exam that your teacher can't answer, or if you are a student without a regular classroom teacher, feel free to call

Mr. Tim Coates, Social Studies 33 Examination Manager
or

Ms. Elana Scraba, Assistant Director, Humanities Diploma Exams
at 403-427-0010.

To call toll-free from outside of Edmonton dial 310-0000.

Good Luck!

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